

February 13, 2023

**Testimony Concerning HB 495:
Early Childhood Development - Child Care Scholarship Program - Funding**

Submitted to the House Committee on Ways and Means

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Child care providers across the nation continue to struggle as they recover during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Child care providers are in crisis, and so are families, and Prince George's County is no exception. I am no exception. In the last two years, we have experienced financial hardship, difficulty finding staff due to hourly wage and low enrollment because parents were not able to work. In Prince George's County, area child care providers like me are experiencing deep challenges with funding/finances, staffing and enrollment which are all totally intertwined.

I urge the Committee to support HB 495 and put into law our recent gains for child care and specifically the investments in the Child Care Scholarship Program (CCSP). Specifically it would put into law the recent gains including:

- expanded family eligibility
- co pay relief for most families
- payment rate increases

Scholarship rates have risen from their abysmal level of the 9th percentile of the market to the 70th percentile of the market, income eligibility was expanded to just over \$90,000 for a family of four, and parental copayments were eliminated for many families and drastically reduced for all others. These gains have been funded with federal dollars approved by Congress. It is time for Maryland leaders to see it through and continue these investments.

If childcare programs are not able to continue to have funding, we would have to close our doors. Our families would then turn to illegal child care and their children will not get the quality care that is needed. The investments must continue in childcare.

Plus, the bill would guarantee access to CCSP for all families who meet eligibility criteria. Although there is currently no CCSP wait list, we have seen enrollment freezes imposed over the past two decades as a means of cutting costs. Under the bill, MSDE would not be able to unilaterally impose an enrollment freeze.

CCSP is currently the State's largest single investment in early childhood education. We must ensure that the State remains committed to protecting recent progress. We hear the General Assembly leaders are already thinking about a big cut to child care – this is the wrong direction! A cut to CCSP would pose great risks to families, children, child care providers, and the economy.

The child care crisis is not over in Maryland. The Child Care Scholarship Program (CCSP) details have seen important improvements thanks to your leadership. There's more to do and we can do it together. Thank you for supporting HB 495.